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Historic McMillin Bridge outside of Orting may be saved

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Kelly Brown walks his dogs along a bike path next to the 78-year-old concrete McMillin highway bridge at right, May 23, 2013. Peter Haley / Staff photographer

PETER HALEY — Staff photographer [Buy Photo](#)

By STEVE MAYNARD — Staff writer

The historic McMillin Bridge outside Orting might be saved.

The state Department of Transportation says it's removing demolition of the 78-year-old span from its application to build a new bridge on state Route 162 across the Puyallup River.

"In the near future, we would propose leaving it there," said John Wynands, WSDOT assistant region administrator for project development.

The required review of demolishing a historic structure already has taken two years, he said. By removing that issue, the state hopes to avoid further delays and move ahead with building a new bridge next spring, he said.

"The old bridge would remain in place, closed to traffic," Wynands said.

The state's plan to tear down the bridge had sparked an outcry from preservationists; The News Tribune wrote about it in the May 31 newspaper.

The concrete truss bridge is believed to be the only one of its kind in the nation.

Puyallup-area resident Bob Peters, who has been working to save the bridge, said the state's decision could be good news.

"We're not celebrating yet," said Peters, a retired WSDOT employee. "It didn't say they're going to leave that there for posterity."

Jeff Sawyer, another state transportation official, wrote to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers last week that "the McMillin Bridge will remain in place after traffic is relocated to the new structure."

Wynands said other groups must be consulted before WSDOT makes a final decision to revise its permit application to the Corps. Wynands said the state Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Puyallup Tribe of Indians support tearing down the old bridge as a condition of building a new one.

Patricia Graesser, spokeswoman for the Corps' Seattle District, said she couldn't address whether the bridge will be spared because the agency hasn't received the revised application yet.

The new, adjacent bridge will cost \$15 million to build. Tearing down the McMillin Bridge would cost an added \$500,000. The project is fully funded with gasoline tax money.

The 170-foot-long McMillin Bridge was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. The Pierce County Council voted in June to put it on the county's Register of Historic Places.

The county's staff report notes that engineer Homer M. Hadley designed the McMillin Bridge. He advocated for the state to build a floating bridge across Lake Washington, and the westbound span of the Interstate 90 floating bridge is named after him.

WSDOT says the McMillin Bridge is too narrow for traffic, rating it "functionally obsolete." The roadway is only 22 feet wide, with no shoulders. When two semitrailers pass each other, their mirrors often hit.

It's unclear what the old bridge would be used for, if it survives. Wynands said his department has no plans to use it. Peters has said he'd like to see it used as a wider crossing for the county's Foothills Trail, which now crosses the river on an old steel railroad bridge.

Pierce County declined an offer last year to assume ownership of the McMillin Bridge, not wanting to inherit its liability and maintenance.

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